

Council hopefuls eye housing plan

City council candidates hope Eugene can follow Corvallis' lead to implement housing standards

By Brad Schmidt
Oregon Daily Emerald

While city councilor candidates and ASUO members continue to call for city-regulated rental housing standards, Corvallis already has a housing code proposal that could be implemented as early as July 1, a lead many local citizens hope Eugene will follow.

Eugene does not have a city-regulated housing code, and ASUO Community Outreach Coordinator Megan Hughes said a plan similar to the housing code in Corvallis would be a much-needed solution.

With the primary election Tuesday, both candidates vying to represent University students on the city council said a housing code would improve living conditions in the campus area and throughout the city.

The Corvallis housing code would affect all rentals within the city limit, an estimated 11,500 units. For each unit, landlords would pay \$8 annually to support the city's housing code program. The estimated \$92,000 would be used to create and enforce housing standards in the areas of plumbing, heating and structural soundness. The code would also require local units to adequately withstand weather conditions.

The code would financially penalize landlords who refuse to pay annual fees or comply with the new standards. The fines would range from one-time \$100 citations to daily assessments of more than \$250.

Those who fail to pay fines can expect to have a lien placed against their property.

"At this point in time, I'm sure it's going to happen," said Bob Loewen, housing programs specialist for the Corvallis Community Development Department — Housing Division.

Corvallis city councilors will vote on the proposal June 3. With a unanimous vote, it will go into effect July 1. Without unanimous approval, the proposal will be resubmitted two weeks later, when only a majority vote will be necessary for its passage, Loewen said.

Investigation into Corvallis housing began in 1997, when the Associated Students of Oregon State University presented a proposal to city councilors suggesting the implementation of a housing code. In response, the city requested the housing division gather data. After more than two years of investigation, a proposal was submitted earlier this year.

The proposal is very similar to state laws already in place. With the exception of a proposed standard that would require heating to reach at least 68 degrees three feet above the floor, there is little difference, Loewen said.

"The real change is that there is local enforcement," Loewen said.

If implemented, Loewen said the proposal will meet tenant wishes for quick resolutions to conflicts.

Currently, options for tenants are limited.

If housing standards are not maintained, tenants can ask a landlord to make improvements, do the work themselves and ask for reimbursement, or sue a landlord.

"There's no one at the state you can go to," Loewen said.

Loewen said he thinks most landlords will comply with the proposal and added that Oregon State University students should benefit from the changes. But Loewen said most landlords will increase rent-related fees, ultimately meaning that tenants will fund the program.

Current Eugene Ward 3 City Councilor David Kelly said he hopes Eugene will take steps to adopt a similar city housing plan.

The Corvallis plan, he said,

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EMU Int'l Student Lounge
Activist Panel: Social Justice Matters
Featuring: Professor of Sociology Chuck Hunt
Bahati Ansari of Racism Free Zone
Bettie Sing Luke of Pan-Asian Community Alliance
Huy Ong, organizer of OSCC
Jose Luis Alonso, Centro Latino



May 22 Wed. 7:00 pm
EMU Gumwood
Int'l performance artist Guillermo Gomez-Pena performing a diorama, dramatizing the dehumanizing impacts of globalization in a thought-provoking and hilarious way. Author of five books and the subject of numerous documentary films...this live performance will make you think and laugh.

May 23 Thurs. 7:00 pm
EMU Gumwood
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